DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 386 242 JC 950 433

AUTHOR	Henriksen, Janel Ann Soule
TITLE	The Influence of Race and Ethnicity on Access to Postsecondary Education and the College Experience. ERIC Digest.
INSTITUTION	ERIC Clearinghouse for Community Colleges, Los Angeles, CA.
SPONS AGENCY	Office of Educational Research and Improvement (ED), Washington, DC.
REPORT NO	EDO-JC-95-05
PUB DATE	Jul 95
CONTRACT	RR93002003
NOTE	4p.
PUB TYPE	Information Analyses - ERIC Clearinghouse Products (071)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Academic Persistence; *Access to Education; Black Students; College Attendance; *College Role; *Community Colleges; *Educational Discrimination; *Educational Environment; Educational Opportunities; *Equal Education; Hispanic Americans; Mentors; Two Year Colleges; Two Year College Students
IDENTIFIERS	ERIC Digests

ABSTRACT

Questions related to underrepresented groups' access to postsecondary education and their experiences while in college are fundamental to the goal of achieving equal educational opportunities for all students. Some researchers have viewed community colleges as important in giving access to students who might not have the academic ability for the intellectual paths of their choice by helping them define and achieve realistic goals. Others argue that they continue class-based separation by tracking less academically prepared students into vocational programs. Both community college supporters and critics agree that they allow more students to enroll in college at a lower cost. Critics, however, highlight the large gap between students in two-year and four-year institutions who attain baccalaureate degrees and note that two-year college students typically come from non-white families with lower incomes and have parents who did not attend college. The 1995 "Transfer Assembly Study" by the Center for the Study of Community Colleges found that only 12% of Hispanic and Black students transferred to four-year institutions, compared to 23% of White students. Cultural influences on minority academic achievement include family expectations of employment after high school, academic testing which places many minority students on remedial tracks, a lack of minority role models, and lack of encouragement from white professors. Fortunately, some colleges have started programs to actively address these issues through recruitment and outreach programs, peer mentors, minority faculty recruitment, and programs to improve campus climate. (KP)

ED 386 242

The Influence of Race and Ethnicity on Access to Postsecondary Education and the College Experience.

ERIC Digest
EDO-JC-95-05

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☒ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

Janel Ann Soule Henriksen
ERIC Clearinghouse for Community Colleges
Los Angeles, California

JC 950 433

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

ERIC® Clearinghouse for Community Colleges

University of California at Los Angeles
3051 Moore Hall
Los Angeles, CA 90095-1521
(310) 825-3931

Digest

July, 1995

EDO-JC-95-05

The Influence of Race and Ethnicity on Access to Postsecondary Education and the College Experience

by Janel Ann Soulé Henriksen

The American ideology promotes the belief that all citizens of the United States are entitled to equal educational opportunities. Hence, colleges and universities must consider the extent to which such goals are being met. Questions pertaining to how minority students attain access to postsecondary education, and the academic and social experiences these students encounter while in college, are fundamental to the goals of achieving equal educational opportunities for all students. This digest offers a focused review of current literature investigating how the goals of access and equal educational opportunities are being met for minority student populations within community colleges.

Community Colleges: Debate Surrounding Its Function

As Americans, we are raised to believe that social mobility, equal access to education, and a job for everyone is the cornerstone upon which our Nation was built. The reality is, however, that our American society is, indeed, stratified. Children and young adults living at or below poverty levels do not receive the same academic or vocational training as do people within higher socioeconomic levels. In addition, underrepresented groups are often kept from achieving those educational goals they seek.

When considering structural barriers established in the system of higher education, a large number of studies focus on the community college as contributing to minority students limited access to higher education. Clark (1960) wrote that the notion of "equal opportunity" in education is equated to the idea of "unlimited access to some form of college" (p. 570). He warned, however, that some students may lack the academic ability to pursue the intellectual paths of their choice. In this case, the community college plays an important role in helping students achieve realistic academic and occupational ends. Clark termed this the "cooling out process," where students are filtered into educational programs commensurate with their academic abilities. Students who have unrealistic personal or occupational goals must be made aware of their limitations, and with the help of a counselor, can reconsider a career or educational path more suited to their talents (Clark, 1960).

This article spawned the advent of much research into the stratifying role that the community college, among other postsecondary institutions, may play within the United States. In response to Clark's work, Karabel (1972) stated that the community college was nothing more than a structure by which class-based separation was continued, and that tracking existed within community colleges by means of vocational education.

Since the incorporation of these two landmark articles into educational thinking, many researchers have questioned the role of postsecondary education in helping students attain their goals. Unfortunately, much of the research into these inquiries focuses on the function of the community college rather than four-year colleges and universities. An excellent summary of the many issues surrounding the efficacy of community colleges was presented by Dougherty (1994). This author stated supporters and opponents of community colleges concur that the community college has enabled more students to enroll in college at a lower cost, while prestigious institutions exercise more stringent admissions policies.

Dougherty described the "fundamentalist" arguments in support of the community college, pointing out that community colleges are within commuting distance of most students, cost less, and are more willing to accept "non-traditional" students such as high school drop outs and those with vocational goals (Dougherty, 1994). Critics, however, highlight the large gap between the number of students in two-year and four-year institutions who attain baccalaureate degrees. This gap, Dougherty explained, could exist because community college students typically come from families with lower incomes, have parents who did not attend school beyond high school, and are non-white. Further, these students often did not do well in high school and have fewer baccalaureate attainment goals (Dougherty, 1994).

In addition to socioeconomic background as being a key determinant in baccalaureate attainment, Dougherty noted that community colleges do not integrate students academically or socially as well as four-year institutions. Participation in extracurricular activities is lower at community colleges than at four-year institutions. Finally, minority and working class students, according to Dougherty, are more unsure about higher education — they want to succeed but are afraid of failing, and are reluctant to achieve academically if it means they must assimilate to the cultural norms inherent in their school (Dougherty, 1994). These institutional barriers to the attainment of academic goals have a deleterious effect on minority students.

Some recent data point to the difficulties minority students face in attaining a baccalaureate degree. The progress of ethnic minority students is lower than the progress of White students at all levels of schooling. The same holds true for minority students who wish to transfer out of community colleges and into four-year institutions. The Center for the Study of Community Colleges *1995 Transfer Assembly Study* reported that only 12 percent of Hispanic and Black students transferred to a four-year college or university, compared to 23 percent of White students. The transfer rates for Hispanic and Black students were consistently lower than for White students at all community colleges, including colleges known for higher transfer

rates for all students. However, in those colleges, the minority students' transfer rates were considerably higher than the norm for their groups. At community colleges with transfer rates in the top quartile, approximately 20 percent of Black students and 24 percent of Hispanic students transfered to four-year institutions, compared to 32 percent of White students.

Cultural Influences on Access to Postsecondary Education

Much has been written on the expectations families place upon their children in terms of educational goals. In many inner-city and working class communities, becoming an "adult" is often linked to gaining employment and earning money after high school, rather than continuing education after the twelfth grade (Richardson, 1990). In addition, the older son of less wealthy Hispanic families is often expected to forego education after high school, as it is his obligation to work in support of his family (Rendón and Valadez, 1993). Often, these family obligations and expectations limit students' educational choices.

Other studies address the influence of institutional barriers to academic attainment. Kanter (1990) evaluated academic testing and placement as a tool to segment students of color into low-level educational paths. Kanter found that minority students were placed in classes at the pre-college (remedial) or associate degree level more often. White students, however, were more likely to be placed in transfer-level courses.

The absence of "role models" also may make the path to higher education difficult for minority students. Williams' 1990 study found that African American students indicated the absence of a role model as a reason for not pursuing higher education. Another factor is a lack of a genuine cultural understanding of students on the part of professors (Rendón and Valadez, 1993). Faculty in community colleges are primarily Caucasian, whereas the student population is becoming increasingly diverse. Professors often have difficulty understanding the academic encouragement and directions that minority students seek, thus feel as though they are simply "lowering standards" in order to account for a multicultural campus. A lack of cultural understanding, on the part of the faculty, may make the students skeptical of remaining enrolled in a community college (Rendón and Valadez, 1993).

What Are Community Colleges Doing to Overcome These Obstacles?

Fortunately, educational planners recognize the importance of programs which encourage the enrollment of a widely diverse student population. Several of these plans were introduced in the AACC's *Multicultural Strategies for Community Colleges* (1995). Some colleges have started programs to actively recruit students to science and engineering programs (Jones, 1992). Other colleges in larger cities have implemented programs to assist minority students while they are still enrolled in high school (California Community Colleges, 1993). Still others invite minority students to serve as peer mentors to high school seniors (Stolar and Cowles, 1992).

The involvement of faculty and staff has not been overlooked. Many states, including Texas, are recruiting minority faculty and administrators with the goal of improving the multicultural climate on campus (Laurel, et al., 1991). In the Multicultural Demonstration Project at George Brown Community College, senior administrators assisted in implementing race and ethnic relations policies for the college, and began to construct effective responses to the concerns of an ethnically diverse student body (Ward, 1990). These programs are only a few of many plans destined to bolster a positive multicultural community.

Conclusions and Recommendations for Future Research

The implications of research on the influence of race and ethnicity on educational access are many. Systematic isolation of minority students in two-year institutions, because of academic difficulties or financial constraints, will not assist in helping minority students attain their individual academic goals. In addition, if minority students' feelings of isolation within college campuses continue, students' motivation to remain in college will decline. Future research must not only focus on the influence race and ethnicity poses on access to education, but also on practical solutions to achieving more equitable access and on creating enriching experiences for all college students.

References

California Community Colleges. "The California Middle College High School Program." Discussed as agenda item 7 at a meeting of the Board of Governors of the California Community Colleges, Sacramento, CA, May 13-14, 1993. (ED 355 999)

Center for the Study of Community Colleges. *Transfer Assembly Study*. Los Angeles: Center for the Study of Community Colleges, 1995.

Clark, B.R. "The Cooling-Out Function in Higher Education." *The American Journal of Sociology*, 1960, 65(6), 569-576.

Dougherty, K. J. *The Contradictory College: The Conflicting Origins, Impacts, and Futures of the Community College*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994.

Isaacs, H.R. "Basic Group Identity: The Idols of the Tribe." In N. Glazer and D.P. Moynihan (eds.), *Ethnicity: Theory and Experience*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975.

Jones, Enid B., ed. *Lessons for the Future: Minorities in Math, Science, and Engineering at Community Colleges*..Report of an American Association of Community Colleges Roundtable, Washington, D.C., August 13-14, 1992. (ED 363 366)

Kanter, M.J. "An Examination of Demographic, Institutional, and Assessment Factors Affecting Access to Higher Education for Underrepresented Students in the California Community Colleges." Paper Presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Boston, MA, April 16-20, 1990. (ED 317 239)

Karabel, J. "Community Colleges and Social Stratification: Submerged Class Conflict in American Higher Education." *Harvard Educational Review*, 1972, 42, 521-562.

Kee, Arnold Madison, and James R. Mahoney, eds. *Multicultural Strategies for Community Colleges*. Washington, D.C.: American Association of Community Colleges, 1995.

Laurel, Elva G., et al. "Employing Peer Coaching to Support Teachers." Teacher Education and Practice, 6, no.2, Fall-Winter, 1990-1991.

Rendón, L. I. and Valadez, J.R. "Qualitative Indicators of Hispanic Student Transfer." *Community College Review*, 1993, 20(4) 27-37.

Richardson, R.C., Jr. "Responding to Student Diversity: A Community College Perspective." National Center for Postsecondary Governance and Finance and the Research Center at ArizonaStateUniversity, 1990.

Stolar, Steven M. and James Colwes. *Enhancing Minority Male Enrollment: Students as Mentors*. Vineland,NJ: Cumberland County College, 1992.

Ward, Barbara. *Report on George Brown College Multicultural Demonstration Project* Toronto, Ontario: George Brown College, 1990 (ED 319 452)

Williams, C. "Broadening Access for Black Students." *Community, Technical and Junior College Journal*, 1990, 60(2), 14-17.

The ERIC Clearinghouse operates under OERI Contract No. RI 93-002-003. The opinions stated in this digest do not necessarily reflect the position or policy of OERI and no official endoresement by OERI should be inferred.